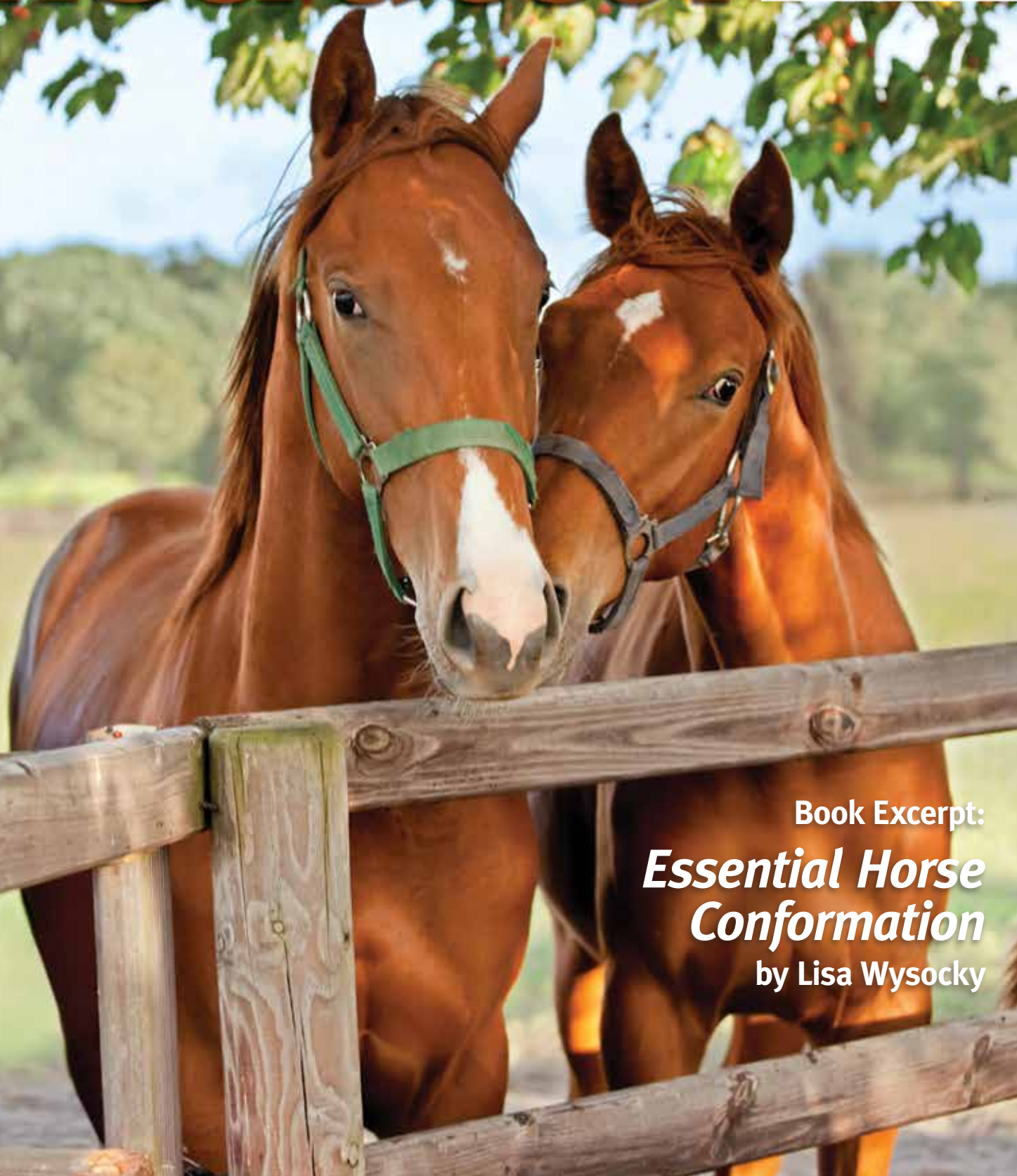


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Helping Your Students Cultivate Life Balance

Part 2

By Laura King, CHt, NLP & Life Coach

IN PART 1 of Helping Your Students Cultivate Life Balance, which appeared in the last issue, I discussed the importance of compassion, empathy, kindly offering appropriate assistance, and the power of enlisting the aid of the subconscious mind. It is a privilege to be in a position to be able to guide students and help them shape positive behaviors that turn into positive outcomes. At the same time, it's tempting to see performance in the ring as more important than other areas of life. In addition, some trainers just don't feel qualified to be able to speak to other areas.

Wanting the best for your students means wanting the best for their entire beings—for who they are as people who are multifaceted and have dynamic relationships with family, colleagues, their finances, their health, and even the way they view the meaning of their lives.

As I mentioned in Part 1, one of the many upsides of being a trainer is that you are a trusted advisor in a position to help your clients/students by encouraging them in everything they do, because one of your goals for them is balance. Balance is a long-game and needs a plan that has demonstrated success. And like anything else we create

in our lives, it takes intention and practice to get onto the right path.

I use a process I have come to call "Figuring It Out" with my clients. It's exactly what it sounds like: we figure out where they are, where they want to go, and how to get there. This work is based on the Wheel of Life (pictured), which illustrates several crucial concepts immediately. What do you notice?

- The wheel has eight parts. Do you even think of Fun & Happiness as a vital part of life to bring your attention to and to cultivate? How about Lifelong Learning and Purpose/Meaning? All of these have

been shown to be essential components of healthy living and also of longevity. If you don't consider them as seriously as you consider, say, Health, why not?

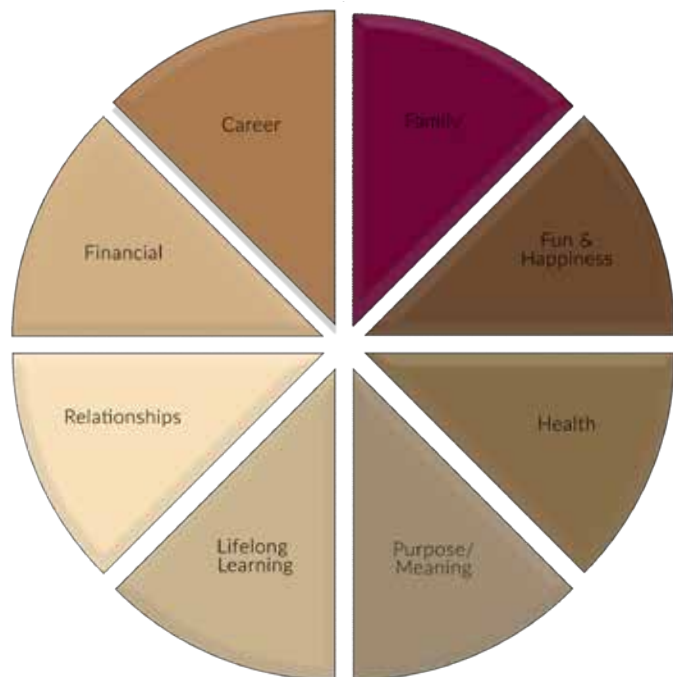
- Each part of the wheel is the same size. Think about that for a moment. Financial is the same size as Purpose/Meaning. They are equally important for balance.
- The shape—the wheel—functions best when it is balanced. All of the areas need to be attended to with similar vigor. If I feel like my career is fantastic and I am rocking it and getting compensated handsomely and I work out regularly and I've got under 15% body fat, but I do that by eating very little and I rarely sleep or socialize and the rest of my life is sorely suffering as well, my wheel might look like this.

The Structure for Figuring It Out

First let me say that as a hypnotherapist, I use this process a bit differently than someone who doesn't have the type of training I have, but that doesn't mean there's no benefit from the process *sans* hypnosis.

Here's what I do, with enormous success, that any coach or trainer can do with their students and clients. I do this for each part of The Wheel of Life.

- 1 Establish a baseline.** You always want to know where you are. The student's starting point is critical for the creation of a plan. Think about it: how do you know how to get to Point B if you don't understand where Point A is?
- 2 Craft outcomes.** When I talk about outcomes, they've got to be detailed and specific. They need to be worded in the present tense—as if the result is the reality.
- 3 Create benchmarks.** That cliché *A failure to plan is a plan for failure* doesn't get the respect it deserves. A plan should say what happens in a year, in six months, in one month, and . . . tomorrow. A plan is a specific set of behaviors that, if practiced according to the structure, will lead to specific outcomes. This doesn't include things that aren't in the realm of our control; no plan can accurately account for such things. We are talking here about what we can control.



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- 4 Implement the plan.** It's not as silly as it sounds to mention this, as many people create gorgeous, detailed plans and specific, beautifully worded outcomes, and then fail to move forward with them. Depending on the student, help with implementation might be your most challenging job.
- 5 Track progress.** After a month, where is the student? How would they fill in each part of their wheel? What about three months? Doing this graphically depicts precisely where they are and where they still need the most work.
- 6 Debrief.** We aren't computers. We are all living, breathing beings with thoughts and feelings related to what is occurring in our lives. At each session with a student or client, yes, you track progress by filling in the parts of the wheel to where they currently are or talk about benchmarks, but you also need to establish where, as they say, "their head is at." What is their attitude, their mindset? What are their deeply held beliefs about themselves and their abilities and how might those beliefs be affecting your work with them?

We are all works-in-progress and we could all use some attention to balance. It makes your work as a trainer as well as in your work as a spouse or partner or parent or sibling or leader or manager or friend a lot easier if you have a sound structure for your process of continuous improvement. ■



About the author:

To learn more about **Laura King**, go to www.laurakinghypnosis.com or www.summithypnosis.com.



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When the Weather Intercedes

By Jessica Jahiel, Ph.D.

OUR WEATHER HAS BEEN SO CRAZY THIS YEAR, we are way off schedule when it comes to getting our horses (and some students!) conditioned for the summer/fall show season. We aren't able to stay organized or be consistent! The kids are bored and frustrated and worried about "wasting time," and I worry that horses are just not going to be really ready when the shows begin.

We try to do more on the days we can work outside, but there are so many days we have to stay in the indoor arena. We will all die of boredom if all we can do is circle the arena forever with an occasional change of direction!

Even my own children are complaining because they want to make progress, which to them means "faster and higher." No way, it's all too risky right now. Can you help?

I THINK WE'RE ALL FEELING the bad effects of the weather changes, not just across the country but around the world. Our only hope is to take the one remedy that's always available to us: We can work more on ourselves than on our horses. We have to become more reactive, responsive, flexible and patient. Those are all good goals for horse folks in any case, but when we can't change the circumstances we need to change our plans and actions and reactions.

As part of your conditioning program, you probably already help your student to observe and analyze the weaknesses of their horses. Help your students learn to see and analyze their own weaknesses as well! Physical preparation for show season is important, but so is mental and psychological preparation. It's always good to keep your horses eager and cheerful, with an "I can do that!" response to each request. But horses

differ in their tolerances and preferences; If you follow horse racing, you know that some horses are classified as “good mudders” and will do their best even on a sloppy track with mud being kicked into their faces from the horses in the lead. Others can’t deal with the mess, become frightened or angry at the mud clots landing in their faces. Those are the horses the trainers will just scratch at the last minute before a race if the track has become sloppy overnight or if racing in the rain becomes a likely scenario. Riders need to know their horses and take the horses’ individual tolerances, talents and preferences into account.

Many of us get just a bit lazy and careless during the winter months, especially if the horses are getting a few months off from the outdoor work that many of us think of as “real” riding. In any case, it’s important to build the horses up gradually once the opportunity arises in the spring. We may have to resign ourselves to getting dirty and having to clean our tack and horses thoroughly after every ride.

Once upon a time, we had a cavalry with very sensible rules aimed at achieving and promoting and maintaining fitness and soundness in both soldiers and horses. In those days, riders rode—and walked. Trot for a mile, and then lead your horse at an energetic walk for a mile—that was the standard for cavalry on the march. The riders were fit enough to avoid overexerting their mounts, and a day’s travel resulted in fatigue, not injuries, at the end of the day. This is something that we can all practice, even if we are limited to the work we can do in an indoor arena, or if our work in the outdoor arena is limited to walking and trotting, or even to walking only.

Walking at your horse’s “normal” speed is useful; walking faster or more slowly (or both, by turn) and taking longer or shorter

strides (also by turn) can be an excellent exercise, helping the riders build their ability to pay close attention to their horses and helping the horses develop their muscles and bones and attentiveness to the rider, as well as building the strength in their hooves. The riders often benefit every bit as much as the horses; if not, well, there’s always the time-honored option of performing the same exercise without stirrups! And eventually there will come a day when the ground is sufficiently dry to allow the same exercises at a trot... and later, perhaps, at a canter.

Another aspect of cavalry training was the constant maintenance of the well-conditioned tack and the well-groomed horses. Riders can benefit greatly from maintaining their horses’ grooming and the maintenance of their tack—both habits promote safety; both increase the important habit of rider awareness. In Pony Club, the standards of which were based on cavalry principles and values, we used to provide regular inspections—including some surprise inspection—

so that we could be certain that standards were being respected and maintained, to the benefit of all of the equines and humans involved. You could do something similar to keep your riders on their toes.

We can add other important elements as well, and once again, the cavalry can provide us with some good examples. Working on manners—developing and confirming good habits—is always time well spent. A horse that responds easily and quickly to the rider’s requests (“stop” and “stand quietly” and “turn”—not to mention “move off promptly when asked”) is a horse that is paying attention to the rider; it’s also showing that it’s accustomed to the rider paying attention to the horse.

Success in a cavalry context depended to a great extent on the physical training

and consistency of communication between horses and their riders; that same training and communication will help your students and their horses in the show ring.

Your complaints are being echoed by instructors everywhere. But the horses, and in the long run the riders, will benefit if the increasing amount of bad—and unpredictable—weather forces everyone to become more attentive to weather and ground conditions as well as to the condition of their horses. It may mean more or different work for instructors, because these changes should lead to more demanding or more technically difficult exercises during practice sessions, all aimed at creating better and more consistent habits on both sides of the saddle (“Horse, I am balanced, sitting tall and deep, and bringing my shoulders down and back—I want you to halt here and now and square, not coast to a sprawled-out stop in another five or six steps after you’ve had some time to consider my request”). When exercises during a session are aimed at building better habits, the time used will be invested and used, not lost and certainly not wasted! You can keep mixing and matching exercises, hold your students’ attention, and help them make steady progress regardless of weather conditions. When they complain anyway, ask them “Isn’t *everyone* dealing with weather problems?” If they are dealing with bad riding weather, chances are that all other area riders are having to cope with the same problems. The key to success will be to invest time in seeking, finding, and implementing the most sensible, progressive, horse-oriented solutions! ■



About the author:

Dr. Jessica Jahiel is an internationally known author, clinician, and lecturer who trains horses, retrains problem horses, teaches, and speaks across the United States, Canada, and England.

She teaches dressage, jumping, and Holistic Horsemanship®, an all-encompassing approach to horse and rider to develop balanced, willing, forward horses and thoughtful, tactful riders.

Readers may access her free newsletter, Horse-Sense, at www.horse-sense.org.

Trot for a mile,
and then lead
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energetic walk for
a mile—that was
the standard
for cavalry
on the march.



How I Found My Support Net(work)

By Didi Arias

I WAS TRAVELING ALONG in my life, happy, confident, and content, when all of a sudden I found myself floating downstream with a short paddle, headed straight towards Poop's Creek. Part of my world did a turn, belly upwards and I felt I was sliding downwards with no net below to catch me. Or was there? I hadn't put one there so was a bit afraid to look down to find out.

That experience wasn't about a tumble off a horse, but more like the Universe shoving me heftily enough to knock me off kilter; a "Hello, it's your turn now" kind of Life Kick. You know the kind, those that make you reel, stop, think, and learn from. Looking back, we got off rather easily because I *did* have a safety net beneath me, only I didn't know it at the time.

My riding business could be described as a "two ponies doing lots of tricks" kind of establishment, with yours truly acting as lead pony and my experienced and handy husband is the volunteer who didn't understand the question. It is home-based, comfortably small, and part of our family. We love it and the life it has given us, and what we have been given back. Then all at once a series of crises struck and things went plop. As it takes two to tango in our little world, things got rocky when we found ourselves without dance partners.

It started when I did something really stupid and fell, injuring an ankle and ending up on crutches and eventually a walking cast thingy. "We can cope with this hiccup," we both agreed. Then my finger went wonky, requiring that I schedule surgery. "Well, this is an added annoyance, but we can manage," we decided. My husband picked up on the physical side of things (which he does on top of running his own business) and I continued teaching, lounging style. Then the ski accident happened: my expert sportsman sidekick shattered one of his wonderfully sensitive riding legs, requiring surgery, pins and a very lengthy convalescence. In doped up denial as he lie in hospital, he looked at me and said "We can cope." Then realization hit and I replied "Sweetheart, no we can't." Faced with the reality of having to hang up "Gone Fishing" signs on the shopfront of not one but our two businesses, I tried to at least put that off with regard to the riding school. I perfected the art of mucking out one-handed, became deft at making plastic garbage bag protectors for my walking cast, and discovered that I could carry pats of hay between my elbows to avoid taking my hand out of the sling. Grooming and tacking up, well, the students love that anyway,

so all seemed manageable on the barn front until I fell off the ramp of the manure trailer whilst failing at one-armed/one-legged wheelbarrow dumping. The picture of a wailing, banged-up, poo-covered me lying at the base of a trailer as the night drew in was not a pretty sight.

Then another bomb fell (You're kidding me, right, Universe?) in the form of a major family crisis which required that I go abroad for a lengthy stay. And that was when it hit that we were now a team of virtually zero players and we needed to do something, and fast, if we were to stay in the self-employed game. Though we had a disaster plan of sorts in the event of brush fire (the natural disaster that at times may befall us here), we had naively omitted to make up a *personal* disaster plan, the kind needed "in case of unforeseen eventualities." We felt exposed, unprepared and without a safety net to catch us as we fell. But we did have something important going for us, for fortunately over the years we had cultivated a strong social network in our small, local community. That social network was to become the fibre of our net and now was the time to cast it.

According to the Mayo Clinic, "A strong social support network can be critical to help you through the stress of tough times, whether you've had a bad day at work or a year filled with loss or chronic illness." We started to think of able bodied people who would be able to take over the physical work, and didn't have to look much further than our office, where our "computer guy" sat updating our system. As it turned out, he used to work in a dressage barn (Glory be!) and wanted nothing more than to get back to being around horses again, *and* he was looking for extra work. Bingo! Add one player to the team! His presence allowed me to get my long-overdue surgery over with

and go on my travels. Leaving home was a drastic move, but as my husband, now hobbling back at his business, and the temporary closing of the riding school (fortunately it was still off season so I was safe-ish there), it was doable. Getting in a locum instructor was not an option, and fortunately my regular students were more than understanding. Yeah, I was going to take a financial hit but we felt we could ride that one out.

Over the ensuing weeks many offers of help came in; being a "I can do it myself" sort of person, I previously had excuses as to why I couldn't accept the help: they are too busy with their own lives/they don't really mean it/I won't be able to pay back the favour. But necessity being the mother of invention, I had to rethink this, and thus I learned that help can come in many forms and even from surprise sources. A veterinarian and a manager from another stable moved horses around for us, a client offered us a

personal loan, anonymous meals were left at our gate, pet sitters miraculously appeared, our shopping was done, our errands run and lifts in cars were given. A health care professional assured me, as she held my hand, that when someone offers to help you, they really mean it. "Be kind to yourself and say 'yes,'" she said. "They really want to help you. You have to learn to accept it." And then I next learned that many people do have the time, genuinely like helping others and want nothing from you in return. Helping others makes people feel good (just look at the whole culture of volunteering). Perhaps they thought my life was interesting enough to want to become more involved in it (after all, horses are cool), or perhaps they just liked my vibe. I won't question people's reasons too much now.

I also learned that it is OK to decline an offer of help if you don't think you

really need it or the form in which it is being offered. I was afraid that declining an offer of help would hurt someone's feelings, but it's just a matter of letting them know that their offer was appreciated, and that you'll take them up on it if and when what they have to offer is really needed.

One of the hardest parts of allowing people to help you is to hand over the reins to someone else, knowing that they won't handle them exactly in the way that you would, but you know, perhaps they'll use those reins even better. There are times when you have to take the risk. For a control freak like me, that's a good exercise in letting go.

Having a support network is extremely important for a small business. Though most of the help we personally received came from our strong social network of friends and peers, help, depending upon how one needs it, can be available from many sources: help organizations, groups and societies in one's profession or even professionals in other fields who can relate to the problem, online groups and forums, family, and even clients. The thing to do is to reach out and not be afraid to say "yes, thanks."

It's been months and thankfully, we were able to weather the multiple storms, largely due to a group of people who came to our rescue and our strong commitment to each other and to what we do. In hindsight, of course we should have planned ahead for this type of life bump, which would have seen us floundering less and relying/delegating more; that would have avoided a lot of the stress and fear. I am now only just back home, exhausted, our injuries are healed, though my husband is still in rehabilitation to get that leg strong again. But before I began the task of picking up the pieces of where I left off, I asked my husband if he would mind taking over the reins for a while, because I needed him now in a different way. "How" he asked? "I just need some sleep—it's been a very long ride," was my reply. ■

About the author:

Didi Arias is a Level 3 ARIA Certified Instructor and national dressage judge and teacher, who resides in Almeria, Spain.

The picture of a wailing, banged-up, poo-covered me lying at the base of a trailer as the night drew in was not a pretty sight.



Teach, Train, Test— In That Order, Please!

By Lydia Fairchok

I RECENTLY ATTENDED a law enforcement training where several skills were introduced with minimal instruction. The students performed the tasks a few times without any feedback about accuracy, then were asked to complete a practical test on the material. Half of the students had prior experience with the tactics, and half did not. Unsurprisingly, the half with previous exposure passed the test on the first attempt, and the other half did not.

As the instructor repeated the practical for those that failed the initial test, he asked one student to identify what they were doing incorrectly. Frustrated, the would-be learner replied “I don’t know—I’ve never done this before!” The same student re-tested and passed with a perfect score—but only after discovering that they had been using an incorrect position and some of their equipment was poorly adjusted for their body type. Wouldn’t it have been nice if the student had received such instruction and correction prior to being asked to pass a test?

The notion of testing a student without first teaching them how to perform the task seems ludicrous, yet many instructors habitually place horses and riders in positions for which they are grossly unprepared. We have all felt sorry for a bewildered pair at a show getting lost in a dressage pattern, or winced as we watched someone scramble around a course of jumps with form so terrible it would disintegrate over anything higher than a ground pole. Even riders who never leave home can become victims of tasks beyond their skill set when faced with horses who are too spirited, riding

conditions that are too extreme, or exercises they are simply not ready to tackle. At best, confidence is damaged or poor skills are rehearsed; at worst, horse or rider are injured or fears are deeply ingrained. These are the results of testing without first teaching and training.

It may seem like splitting hairs to say that there is a significant difference between *teaching* and *training*. After all, many dictionaries incorporate one term into the definition of the other, and they are certainly interchangeable in a number of contexts. For purposes of discussion, however, let’s specify that to “teach” is to impart a skill through explanation and instruction, and to “train” is to refine that skill into proficiency through repetition and feedback. One creates understanding, and the other applies that understanding to action. Both must occur in order to make a positive experience of testing, which is where the skills that have been taught and trained are then evaluated to see whether or not they have been completely absorbed.

Testing can manifest in many forms. The rider tests him or herself by competing; the instructor tests the rider by requiring them to perform the skill independently; the horse tests the rider with challenging behavior; the environment tests the rider with footing, boogeymen, and equipment failures. When a student has been taught and trained in each element that composes the skills being tested, they are confident and able to perform. If a student lacks a foundation, they must fumble through the test and suffer the results as they come. As an old saying goes, “when the time for action has come, the time for preparation is past”.

Some riders are quite resilient and don’t mind spill after spill; they may even get quite good at hanging on to horses that terrorize their passengers with bad habits. Some riders do not know (or care) enough to be ashamed of careening around with incorrect form. A few pick up on skills with apparent ease, which creates a facsimile of understanding and masks the need for teaching and training. When the natural

progression of teaching, training, and testing is violated, however, the rider is left with a framework of holes, underdeveloped or incorrect neural pathways, and no way to appreciate proper skills. To teach without training and testing is to never incorporate knowledge from the brain to the body. To train without teaching and testing is to enforce methods with no meaning. To test without first teaching and training is to set students up for failure.

The law enforcement student who was asked to pass a test without having been taught or trained in the material was frustrated and came away with little independent knowledge of the task, despite the improved score. I know, because I was the student. Completion of a task does not equate to competency, and there is no substitute for properly teaching, training and testing a student—in that order, please! ■



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The Athletic Equestrian League puts a New Twist on Competition

By emphasizing horsemanship and a defined standard, this organization is working to demystify the judging process

By Sally Batton with Christina Keim

STANDING BY THE IN GATE, you review your course one more time. You straighten the sleeve of your jacket while your friend wipes invisible dust off your gleaming black boots. You take a deep breath and enter the ring. For the next two minutes, you are totally focused; you find the perfect canter, nail every distance and land on every lead. You are sure this is it—your break through round, the one that finally puts you at the top of the class. But when the results are called, your number isn't even on the list. And you are left ringside, wondering why your "best round ever" didn't receive a ribbon.

When judging equitation rounds, there will inevitably be some subjectivity. While major mistakes are easy to score, the separation between riders whose performances are fairly similar requires that judges consider subtle variables in order to create a ranking. This can leave riders, parents and coaches confused about what went wrong—when in reality, many things could be going right.

As a longtime intercollegiate coach, this conundrum is one which I am intimately

familiar with. In a typical equitation class, you can have a winner who is the strongest of a weak group, or someone who is the weakest of a strong group. The results don't always reflect the quality of the performance.

After thirty-five years of trying to explain uneven results to my students, I began to dream of a different means of assessing rider performance in the show ring—one that would rely on objective, not

AEL Nationals Minis Division receive their awards.

subjective, criteria. In 2010, I founded the Athletic Equestrian League. For riders in the AEL, the score *always* reflects their individual performance, because the organization's scoring system compares riders in the same class to a described standard, not to each other. In AEL, you are really riding against yourself, and trying to get a better score each week.

The AEL combines elements from the traditional equitation world, interscholastic/intercollegiate style showing and dressage competition to create a fusion which exemplifies some of the best aspects of each. Competitions are offered for both English and western riders.

In creating the AEL, I tried to listen to what coaches, parents, riders and horse professionals wanted in a competitive opportunity for high school riders. Coaches wanted to be able to host shows despite having small arenas, so we never have more than four or five jumps in the ring. Parents didn't want to spend all day waiting for their child to ride, so riders go back to back in their classes. Equine professionals wanted more horse knowledge. And riders wanted to know how they did, from the judge.

AEL riders are divided into levels based on their previous experience; they do not have to bring a mount, and instead ride a horse provided by the show host. Each rider completes three phases at a competition. First is a group ride on the flat (English) or horsemanship phase (western), which counts for 40% of the score. Immediately afterwards, each rider demonstrates an individual fences test or pattern ride on the same horse, which also counts for 40%. Finally, competitors complete an unmounted horsemanship practicum, which counts for 20% of the total score. In each phase, judges score riders against a detailed standard, and riders leave the show with the judge's written comments on their performance.

The AEL's unique scoring system and the written feedback from the judge are two of its most important features. In traditional competition, where scoring is a subjective thing, you don't necessarily know

how you did. AEL gives a set of scores that parents, coaches and riders can understand. The written feedback lets all parties know exactly what went well and what needs to be improved for the next show. Riders are always trying to improve their scores based on the judge's comments.

On the flat, English riders can be asked to perform level appropriate tests such as halts, sitting trot, two point and hand gallop. Jump courses are condensed and ride more like an equitation test pattern than a traditional course. For example, riders might jump a line, change directions, halt, then jump the next fence from the hand gallop. During the group horsemanship phase, Western riders are assessed on their position, handling of the horse during transitions, and some elements of ranch riding like posting. Western patterns are a fusion of elements from trail, horsemanship and ranch riding competition.

"I am a big fan of the equitation test and patterns," says Coach Ronald Bartholomew, whose RGB Equestrians, Skaneateles, N.Y., captured the team National Reserve Championship in 2018 in their first year of AEL competition. "The elements of the courses lend themselves more to effective riding, and at the end of the day riders get score sheets giving feedback on what they did well and what needs to be improved."

AEL was originally open only to riders in fourth through twelfth grade but has since expanded to include divisions for "mini's" (first-third graders) and adults. There are teams competing from the northeast to California, from Ohio to Hawaii. In September 2018, the first intercollegiate invitational was held at Dartmouth College, with teams from several New England colleges and universities competing. AEL Collegiate is scheduled to launch in Fall 2019.

The AEL has grown by leaps and bounds since 2010 but is currently mostly in New England. If there aren't any teams in your area yet you can host competitions with just two teams, so find another barn in your area that is interested. In addition, because the AEL is still growing, athletes only need to compete in three competitions to qualify for the National Championships. Teams can represent schools or barns, and riders compete wearing their program's logo wear rather than traditional show attire.

To learn more about how to participate or even start a team of your own, visit the Athletic Equestrian League website at <http://www.athleticequestrian.com/>. ■



Sally Batton, Founder and President of the Athletic Equestrian League.

About Sally Batton, the Founder and President of Athletic Equestrian League:

Since 1990, Sally has been the Director of Riding and Varsity Equestrian Head Coach at Dartmouth College in Hanover, NH and has led the varsity Dartmouth Equestrian Team to five Ivy League Championships and six IHSA Zone I, Region 2 Championships. She was recognized in 2013 with the Intercollegiate Horse Shows Association Lifetime Achievement Award.

Sally is a Level III certified instructor with ARIA and in 2008 was awarded Instructor of the Year. In 2010, Sally saw a need for a riding league for both children and adults that would reward good horsemanship and score riders on a more objective basis and developed the Athletic Equestrian League.

Sally is also a clinician teaching jumping, horsemanship, western and polocrosse in clinics around New England, Hawaii, Alaska and as far away as South Africa.

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Discover the AEL, a riding league for 1st-12th graders and adults in both the English and Western disciplines. The AEL is a fun, educational league that includes flat/horsemanship, fences/patterns and an unmounted Practicum.

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The Roads Not Traveled

By Kate Selby

YOU ARE FINALLY GOING TO FULFILL the dream of running your own equine business—good for you! Now comes the big question: Do you buy your own place, rent or lease a facility or part of one from someone else, or do you freelance and travel to your clients?

When I started out, two friends of mine were also ready to move up with their horse businesses. As it happened, we each made very different choices. All were successful—and remain so—and each choice had its pros and cons.

Freelance

If you truly freelance, you don't need a barn—or any infrastructure. Instead, you travel to where your clients are, whether private homes or public stables, to teach and train. The benefits are clear. You can teach virtually anywhere you are willing to travel. You have no expenses for owning or building a facility, and therefore no expenses for maintenance, insurance, and taxes on infrastructure. With few overhead (mostly travel and insurance), bookkeeping is easy and accounting costs are low.

Given that you will travel to other barns and homes, you likely won't be boarding or maintaining school horses, so the time and overhead involved, including possible payroll for staff, are also not an issue. Insurance costs are minimal, as you may only need liability coverage as an instructor.

It sounds great, doesn't it? Few expenses, lots of teaching, just what you wanted! Yet, without a physical location, it will be harder to establish yourself and your services in a community. You will need to spend a lot of time doing self-promotion, spreading the word that you are out there and available. You'll need to keep up with publicizing your business, such as posting testimonials, and advertising services and events. Without the ability to host events, which is a great way to get word of mouth publicity, you will need to work hard to

maintain a presence, virtually, physically, and by reputation.

Many facilities do not accept outside trainers, as they are doing their best to promote the services they offer, and to accommodate their own clients. As an outside trainer, you may be perceived as competition. If you do find places that allow outside trainers to offer services, you will, in general, be working according to someone else's schedule. There may be fees or percentages involved you'll need to pay the farm management for each client. And clients are often more invested in working with their in-house trainers and coaches than utilizing someone from outside, meaning they may be less reliable sources of income.

Many freelance instructors teach at several different locations. Keep in mind that, while you may not be spending time cleaning stalls or grooming and tacking school horses, you'll be spending time in the car getting from place to place. For some, that's easily worth it. But traveling all the time is not everyone's cup of tea. Even as a

freelance instructor you will still need insurance (most facilities you visit will require proof of insurance), and you will want to make sure that the facility is covered to allow you to be there, as well.

Renting

Renting or leasing a facility, or a block of stalls within a facility, can be a good way to go. Many of the benefits of freelancing exist, while also including some of the benefits of a fixed location.

By renting, you are not tied to the real estate, making it easier to relocate than if you had to sell. You won't have property taxes or homeowners insurance, though a portion of those costs will be factored into your rental fees. You may be able to combine certain costs with other professionals using the space on such things as hay, bedding, insurance and labor. And since you don't own the property, there is little or no maintenance on your part for such things as lawn mowing, general repairs, driveway, parking, fencing and stable maintenance, to name a few.

You are responsible for your own business, and retain decision-making regarding services offered (as permitted) and your schedule. Though there is more overhead than freelancing, the accounting is relatively simple if you don't hire employees.

Some of those advantages are also the disadvantages. You can't dictate when or how repairs and property maintenance and improvements occur. You may need to work closely with other professionals and their businesses and schedules.

Good contracts are necessary to make

sure that your needs are met, while preventing miscommunications with the property owners and other renters. Contracts should be reviewed regularly to make sure they continue to meet your needs.

When renting or sharing a space, you may not be able to offer all the services you'd like, for example: shows, clinics, trail rides, and camps. Then again, maybe the owners or other trainers would help out and you could join forces for mutual benefit. If you plan on a public lesson program, you will need to make sure the scheduling works well for everyone.

Sharing space can create its own complications. You need to get along with your associates and to keep in mind that your reputation is tied to others actions: for better or worse the businesses around you, and the way they deal with their clients may reflect back on you, whether you want it to or not.

Owning a farm

Perhaps your dream is of owning your own farm. That was my dream, and it's been very successful for me. You may even have the beginnings of a facility if you have some land and an outbuilding or two. But don't be fooled—it often costs more to make a property fit your needs than to start from scratch. The "pros" of owning your own facility are many. You are definitely your own boss. You can set your own schedule, create the spaces you most want and need, offer the programs you'd like to have, and you have a consistent presence in the community. Clients and visitors will know who you are, where you are and what you do,

The Road Not Taken

by Robert Frost

Two roads diverged in a yellow wood,
And sorry I could not travel both
And be one traveler, long I stood
And looked down one as far as I could
To where it bent in the undergrowth;

Then took the other, as just as fair,
And having perhaps the better claim,
Because it was grassy and wanted wear;
Though as for that the passing there
Had worn them really about the same,

And both that morning equally lay
In leaves no step had trodden black.
Oh, I kept the first for another day!
Yet knowing how way leads on to way,
I doubted if I should ever come back.

I shall be telling this with a sigh
Somewhere ages and ages hence:
Two roads diverged in a wood, and I—
I took the one less traveled by,
And that has made all the difference.

which helps tremendously with word of mouth advertising.

Although it can be costly, the money you put in to your own place is equity you can recover later. A freelance instructor or a trainer who leases space in someone else's barn does not earn equity. If you run an active business and keep your facility in good condition, it's likely you will maintain or even increase the value in your property investment.

As the property owner, you can still freelance elsewhere, if you have the time, and

➤ *continued on page 19*



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Book excerpt:

Essential Horse Conformation

By Lisa Wysocky

Lisa Wysocky's sixteenth book, *Essential Horse Conformation: 51 Checkpoints Before You Buy*, covers fifty-one conformation points that are essential to understand before buying or leasing a horse. The book is also applicable to those who already have horses, and who want to re-assess a horse's physical ability as he or she ages.

"In my travels and in my clinics I run across so many people who are disappointed in their horse choices," said Wysocky. "I wanted to write a go-to book that horse lovers of all ages, abilities, and experiences could use and learn from. This book walks readers through the nose-to-tail process of choosing the best horse(s) for their needs, and sets readers and their horses up for a high ratio of success."

Essential Horse Conformation is published by Fura Books and retails for \$12.95. It is available on www.amazon.com

Excerpt

WHenever I first look at a horse I do a nose to tail conformation assessment, and over time, I have found fifty-one special conformation points that are key in making decisions about the horses you choose to add to your herd. When you first begin to do these, it may take an hour or more to look at each part of the horse, assess it, and then put the parts together to create a whole. Only then can you make an informed decision as to whether this particular horse is perfect for your needs. After you have done several dozen of these assessments, it may only take you ten or fifteen minutes to go nose to tail. And, if you have a specific purpose in mind for the horse, then you may be able to tell in less than a minute whether or not this is the horse for you.



Chest width: Both of these horses are 15.2, but you can see the very different widths of their chests and the length of their legs.

GENERALLY SPEAKING, a horse with a long neck is more athletic than a horse who has one that is short, as there is more length that the horse can use to balance himself. Also, a horse with a neck that rises upward, versus a neck that stretches out horizontally in front of the horse, will give the horse a more up and down movement, especially at the trot. The horse will also have more elevation of movement off the ground, and in knee and hock action. You may have ridden a horse whose springy trot made it difficult not to post too high, that horse probably had a neck that rose upward. Think Saddlebred.

This big movement at the trot can actually be beneficial as it teaches riders to get—and keep—their heels down. If the heels come up, the big movement will throw the rider forward. It doesn't take too many times of that happening before a rider's heels stay consistently down.

You may want a horse who provides a smoother ride. If so, look for a horse with

a horizontal neckline such as the stock type breeds usually provide. The trots are smoother, and usually there is less movement at the walk.

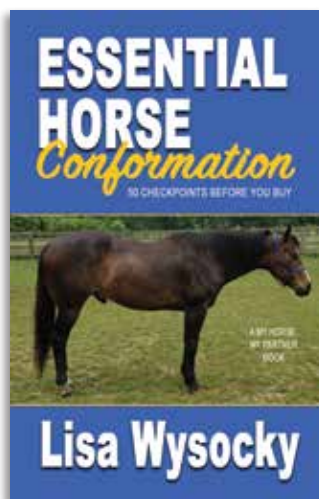
A gaited horse, depending on the breed, will have a neck of good length with some elevation, and usually will provide smooth movement at the walk and gait.

Next, view the width of the horse's chest from the front. Depending on your needs you may be looking for a wide-chested horse or a narrow one. Narrow chested horses are often found in gaited breeds, such as the Tennessee Walking Horse or Spotted Saddle Horse, and in the Arabian and

some Thoroughbreds.

Wider chested horses can be found in the Haflinger, Fjord, draft crosses, and stock horse breeds (Quarter Horse, Appaloosa, and Paint). Many ponies also are wider, although the Hackney pony and some other pony breeds can be very narrow.

The advantage with a wide chest is that it usually also provides a broad back, and





Cecal swing: In looking at this horse's barrel, the cecal swing on the right side is apparent.

many riders balance better with a wider base. Keep in mind, though, that there are variations in every horse. Just because a horse is an Arabian, don't assume that the chest and back will be narrow. That's another reason a thorough assessment of each individual horse is so important.

The width the barrel provides is also key. If a rider has difficulty with the inner thigh stretch needed to ride a draft cross, for example, then a horse with a flatter barrel will be more comfortable. If you need the stability of a broader back, however, you will find it on a horse with a wide barrel.

Most important, though, is that the horse's left and right barrel are mostly even. To look, stand ten to fifteen in front of the horse and first look at the shape of the barrel. Is the roundness (or flatness) even on both sides? For riders who prefer an even, symmetrical horse and movement, this evenness in the shape of the barrel is critical.

One reason both sides of the horse's barrel might not be similar is due to arthritis and/or muscle atrophy. If the horse is older, but once worked hard at polo, cutting, barrel racing, or another such sport, this might be the case. A few rubs or pats on both sides will allow you to check the area for soreness.

You might see that the right side of the horse's barrel is larger than the left. The horse stores much of her food in the cecum, which is on the right side of her body. When the horse has eaten a lot of hay, the right side of her barrel may bulge outward, and as she walks toward you, you will see a large left to right swing of her belly. This is called the cecal swing.

Depending on what the horse ate, or didn't eat, before you arrived, you may not see much of a swing. Some horses have a huge cecal swing, while others, even with a belly full of hay, do not have much at all.

Regardless of the cause, an uneven barrel can put unbalanced riders even more off balance. If the rider's left leg drops vertically on a flat barreled horse, but the right leg has to spread outward at the hip to accommodate a large cecal swing, or more muscle tone on the right side, the horse might not be a suitable mount. ■

About the author:

Lisa Wysocky is an award-winning author, equine clinician, and motivational speaker who trains horses for and consults with therapeutic riding programs. She is also a PATH instructor and was chosen as one of the country's Top 50 riding instructors by the American Riding Instructor's Association. She is the co-founder and executive director of Colby's Army, an award-winning therapeutic riding program in Ashland City, Tennessee. Lisa is also the author of the Cat Enright equestrian mystery series, which has been optioned for film and television. She splits her time between Tennessee and Minnesota.

► *The Roads Not Travelled,* *continued from page 17*

you can choose to rent space to other trainers, which will generate income and help with your costs. Of course, it also means sharing and making space for another person to run their business, so choose wisely if you go that route.

Being the "landlord" has both pluses and minuses. For people who like to be the boss regarding all care and decisions, it's ideal. You are responsible for attending to all maintenance and repairs, plus any improvements you may wish to make. This means you can set the schedule for all such work, and ensure that it is done to your standards. It also means while you can make changes and maintain the

property according to your own schedule and desires; you are the one who must make sure it all happens!

There are added costs in owning, such as general liability insurance, your mortgage, and property taxes. Then again, you need to live somewhere, so you may actually save by combining where you live with where you work.

Maintaining a facility will also require a solid base income. It may be a lesson program or boarding, which will mean higher overhead costs, or a regular schedule of camps and events. Do your homework to make sure that the once the overhead costs are covered, the programs generate enough income for your business to support you—not the other way around!

What will you choose?

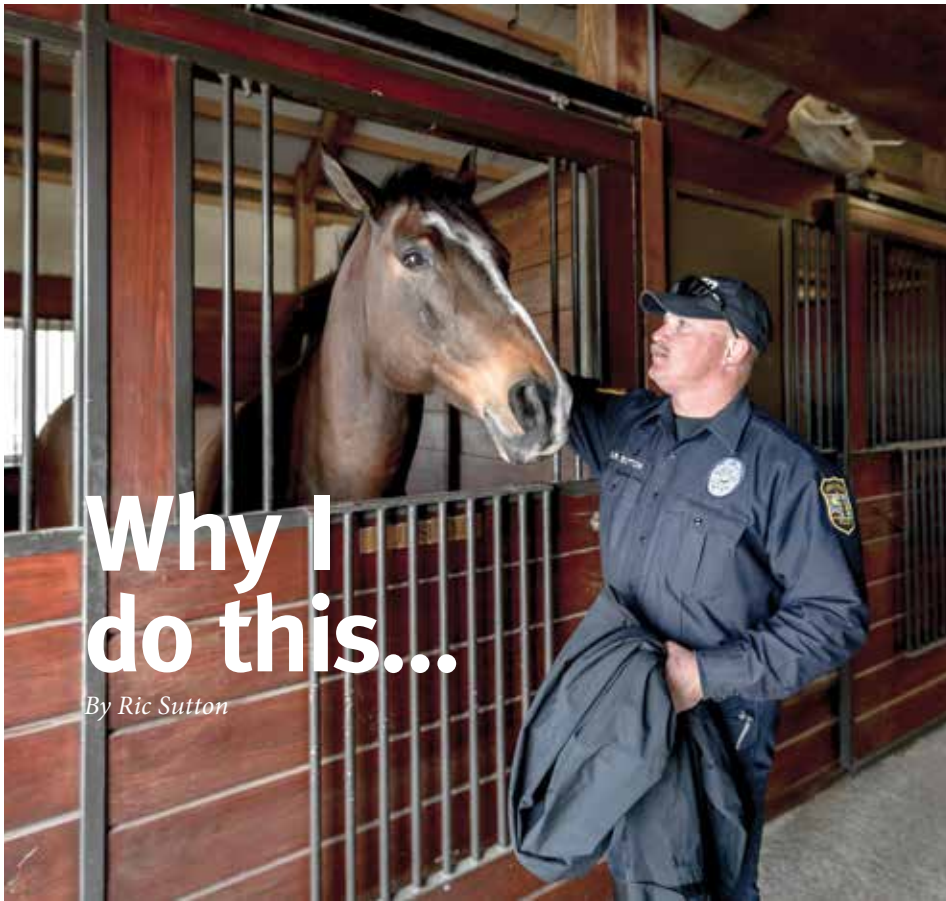
Exploring these different options may not give you "The Answer," but will help you decide what may work best for you, both now and in the future. And many horse businesses are a mixture. For example, I began my career as a freelance instructor and trainer, and now I've owned my current farm for 25 years offering lessons, boarding and training, and many events, while occasionally still traveling to teach, train, and coach at other facilities.

Which road will you choose? Will you buy or build your own facility? Will you find space to rent a facility or lease part of one that already exists? Or will you remain a freelance practitioner, with no fixed location?

In the end, when it's time to up your game and make a career from teaching and training, there is no right answer; there is only the next step. What's important is to consider your options, make plans, and then act, knowing that as your career grows and develops you can adopt and change, because an equine career is not a goal, but a lifelong path. ■

About the author:

Kate Selby is an ARIA Level III instructor in Dressage and Hunt Seat and winner of the ARIA Instructor of the Year. When she's not teaching, coaching the Middlebury College Equestrian Team, or hunting the hounds for Green Mountain Hounds, she generally has her nose in a book. She lives on her farm in northern Vermont.



Why I do this...

By Ric Sutton

IT WAS A COLD, RAINY DAY, best described by Dr. Seuss. I watched the flurry of activity at the barn with personal and professional satisfaction. I finished my coffee and slogged through the muck down to the barn as the girls finished loading the truck. The girls loaded “Simon Says” into the trailer and we set off.

As the scenery rolled by I smiled at the conversation in the back of the truck. My eldest daughter, Hannah, was quizzing and encouraging one of my students, and newest Pony Clubber, Jordan. Hannah and Jordan covered every possible subject in the semi-random pattern common to girls of that age. Gaits, conformation, nomenclature, tack, and all of the information involved in a Pony Club Certification test bounced to and fro like the U.S. Open. When we arrived at the stable where the test was being held, I helped unload the truck but left Simon’s care to Jordan under the watchful eye of Hannah.

Hannah and Jordan worked in concert to get everything ready for Jordan’s first Pony Club Certification. Two years

of effort had brought us here as a team. I gave Jordan a thumbs up and told her that she would do well as she walked to start her knowledge portion. I spent the test period discussing the process with Jordan’s mom, who like so many parents, is new to the horse world and the many peculiarities thereof. Jordan returned to the stall with a smile and announced that she had only missed one question. They tacked up and departed for the ring. Again I stood along the rail and explained to Jordan’s mom what was happening and why. Hannah ran a quiet commentary on what Jordan was doing and its relationship to the standards. Not surprisingly, Jordan passed with “exceeds standards” on most tasks. This is a testament to her efforts and

Photo by Craig McClure.
Image courtesy of the city of Virginia Beach.

those of Hannah acting as her mentor and riding buddy.

This was a moment for me. Hannah is a third generation equestrian. Aided by my mother, Rosemary Larkin, Hannah began riding and showing at three years of age and rated as a D1 Pony Clubber at four years old. Now as a C1 one with years of training, showing and rallies under her belt, she is passing on her knowledge and passion as a mentor, coach, and assisting instructor. Her growth is something amazing to watch and I know her Grandmother would be proud to see her labor come to fruition. Simon Says is part of the equation as well. My mom brought Simon home for Hannah just a few days after she was born and they were inseparable until a couple of years ago when Hannah passed his reins to Jordan. A circle is nearing completion.

These are the moments that drive me as an instructor, trainer, and dad. Every one of us who spends our time passing on our knowledge, skill, experience, and passion, does so for very personal reasons. It probably isn’t for fame, as most people don’t know our names. I doubt it’s for the money, as very few of us become millionaires. It can’t be for the ease of the lifestyle; tired, sore and covered in hay, shavings and manure. So it must be something else. For me, it’s watching and aiding the growth of people whose passion runs deep. The joy and pleasure of reaching goals, mastering skills and growing as a person and equestrian. This makes me happy and is why I do this. I hope your reason leaves you smiling as well. ■

*Have a good ride,
Ric*

About the author:

Officer Ric Sutton is a twenty-seven year veteran police officer in Virginia Beach, Virginia. His assignments have covered a wide span of the law enforcement spectrum. He has most recently been assigned to the Mounted Patrol, and is the director of the East Coast Mounted Patrol Association.



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Push and Pull Means No Place to Go

By Nikki Alvin-Smith
Photos courtesy of the author

THE NEMESIS OF EVERY RIDER, particularly in the early stages of riding, is the “push and pull” factor. We have all seen big-moving warmbloods, hounded by the rider’s forceful seat and leg aids, slam their mouths into unrelenting hands. In fact, the more extravagant moving your horse of any breed, the more likely it is you will go to the rein to help support your seat.

Over the years I have imported many horses from Europe. If you have ever ridden or brought one of these big-moving horses home, you know that when you first sit aboard these talented beasts, your arms are pulled out of their sockets. Brace your back—no joke. In order to extract the most movement from sale horses, the classical approach to training the horse is often overlooked.

Even riders with brilliant seats use reins to re-balance, not their horse, but themselves. Habits die hard, and bigger-moving horses are skilled at causing mayhem through transitions for the rider used to a smaller-gaited horse. Regardless of the breed or talent of your horse, it is important to equip yourself and your students with the right tools to ensure there is no push and pull on the horse. Push and pull

leaves the horse with nowhere to go and will result in either a horse that “switches off” when ridden and has no forward movement at all, or a tense horse. Either horse is an unhappy horse.

Let’s take a look at how to fix this common problem.

One Two Three

Apply the “one, two, three rule” rigorously. That is, the horse must answer the forward aid of the leg and step forward promptly. A small squeeze of your leg aids should move your horse forward from the halt into the walk. Once in the walk, use alternate leg aids in time with the hind leg footfall.

If you ask your horse once and he does not respond, immediately use the aid again, this time slightly stronger. If he does not respond, tap him with a whip behind your heel. However he moves forward, a lurch or a bounce or even into a trot, be certain not to hit him in the mouth with your rein aids. It is also important that you reward him for responding in whatever forward method he chose. Use your voice and pat him to tell him how good he was and simply sit tall and breathe in to bring him back to the walk.

Remember riding is not about pulling or pushing, it is about releasing. You cannot re-use any aid if it just stays there. So tapping with the leg is better than holding.

The Reins

The soft release of the inside rein will be timed exactly to the inside hind leg forward footfall. This is especially important in upward and downward transitions. Close your fingers softly (use Sally Swift’s holding birds image), and ride with pressure on the thumb and forefinger only. Most importantly, your wrists should not be turned. The outside frame will run from your elbow to the flat back of your hand to rein to bit, and your elbows will be resting at a right angle almost touching your waist. Your hands will be following the movement, not holding it. The horse must hold himself.

One of my favorite expressions when teaching is to tell the student, “We are not carrying tea on a tray to the Queen.”

Are you a butler in the saddle? Relax. Put your shoulders back, let your arms hang in their natural position at your side and with your elbows just there, adjust your rein length. Of course the vertical line is basic, through the heel, the hip, the elbow, the ear. Can you maintain it during transitions? Can you follow the horse's back with a left/right hip movement in the sitting trot and remember to breathe, or do you bump up and down with a "unihip"?



Timing is Everything

To follow the horse's back and movement and to time your aids correctly is harder than you think. Have a friend take a video of you in action.

Are you prepared in your core to absorb forward movement by releasing your breath in time with the aid request? Whatever discipline you ride, you need to address your aid timing. Driving aids such as leg and seat should always come in advance of a rein aid. For example, in dressage training, before a canter pirouette do you have a bouncy, energetic forward canter with lots of "pop" and soft following hands? Or have you pulled your horse into a tight back with your tense seat and your effort to turn your head to your forthcoming movement with a stiff neck and braced back? Our serious faces and unsmiling mouths tense our jaws, and you will find this results in your horse tensing his jaw. Smile a little. Smile a lot. Can you see your horse smiling yet with a soft jaw and relaxed eye and listening ears?

Amazingly, students who make this repair to their riding habits and address their deficiencies are surprised with the immediate improvement in all their "work"—whether piaffe, half passes, or counter canter. The quality of any transition, within the gait and between gaits, determines the outcome of the next movement. For hunter/jumper riders or eventers, the horse will be between your seat and hand and working in front of

your leg, which provides automatic power steering between and before fences.

The horse and rider in this photo show great suppleness, and the horse exhibits great trust in the hand. The rider had previously broken both arms, one at the shoulder and one at the wrist (that was not set properly), so we can forgive the elbows not being completely at the waist. This is a suppling exercise recheck to show the horse is over his back and soft in his jaw. Note the expressive front

leg of the horse and nice track on the circle. Notice the listening ears and relaxed tail of the horse, and the rider's slight waist turn to the right with the chin up and inside leg perfectly placed. This horse has also been blessed by never having been ridden by anyone without a truly independent seat. Not all horses are this fortunate.

Exercises to Help

In my experience as a clinician I find students are also surprised to discover they have fallen prey to the habit of holding. The remedy is to go to trot work on a circle with transitions to walk, paying attention to the quality of the downward transition. Begin making trot/walk/trot transitions, being careful to work the transitions from the back to the front of the horse. Use leg and seat aids with very light half-halts on the outside rein. Once you have mastered this from trot to walk, you can perform the same exercise in canter/trot/canter. Frequent transitions will help make your horse lighter in the rein, and the use of the circle provides engagement of the inside hind leg. You can also take your horse's head to the outside and repeat. This works better on the full arena for a young, unbalanced horse.

Never ride your horse with his head entirely straight. I'm not talking about tipping his head—that won't do. But you

➤ *continued on page 25*



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Sponsor Spotlight

By Donna Hartshorn

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Explore more at stephens.edu/academics ■



Photo courtesy Stephens College.

► *Push and Pull continued from page 23*
should just see his eye. I prefer to work my horses with their eye to the outside more of the time than inside. But it depends on a number of factors; your horse and his balance; his conformation; what you are schooling; which side, his stiff or hollow side; which side, your stiff or hollow side. Repeat the work until your horse says, "Ah, yes, I see, this is my job and I am happy to do it." Praise him.

When trainers like Klaus Balkenhol tell their students, "Go back to basics and then the rest will follow," they are not kidding. How many Grand Prix riders would agree that their most improved tests came after such basic corrective reasoning from a ground person who was not shy to say just what they saw? Working with the Rehbein threshold with no tolerance for the push

and pull certainly improved this rider trying to correctly absorb the big forward movement. Humiliating at first, but once I realized I needed to just make three good strides then bring the horse down a gait or collect the gait, before I lost my position and good feelings, it became quite easy. You don't need to visit Grunwaldhof to learn to ride correctly, a good trainer with a decent eye can be your ground person. All trainers need a trainer!

Other icons like George Morris also consistently discuss the timing of the aids with their students, and even their most advanced and successful ones are taken to task if they have compromised their timing of the aids or have resorted to a push and pull riding style.

Get religious about the timing and application of your aids. Your horse will love it.

Once these basic tenets of aid timing and application are consistently met, you can address the fine-tuning of your horse with the refining half-halt. What are those little fingers for after all? Stay tuned. We shall find out. ■

About the author:

Nikki Alvin-Smith is an international Grand Prix dressage trainer/clinician who has competed in Europe at the Grand Prix level earning scores of over 72%. Together with her husband Paul, who is also a Grand Prix rider, they operate a private horse breeding/training farm in Stamford, NY.

Words of Wisdom

"My horses are my friends,
not my slaves"

— Reiner Klimke

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Dressage for Everyone

By Nikki Alvin-Smith

Photos courtesy of the author

YES, I KNOW. You've heard before that dressage training benefits every horse and every rider. The news may be old but have you been sold?

The truth is, the benefits of dressage training are real. Whether you ride Western or English there is a dressage program for you. Why is dressage so important for both horse and rider? Here are a few key factors to consider:

Balance

A horse may be in rhythm but this does not mean he is in balance. Your horse can be moving nicely forward, but he can be down on his forehead, heavy in your hands, with his hind legs trailing out behind his hips and his back down like a hammock in which you sit. Uncomfortably (for both of you) I might add.

With dressage work and correct bit connection developed by engagement from behind, the horse will attain better

balance. This will lead to improved soundness and muscle development of the horse. The rider's correct position will be easily maintained because the elevated and active topline of the horse provides a softer "seat" on which the rider can sit.

If you listen to the footfalls of a horse that is on its forehead, they will be louder than those you hear when the same horse is well-engaged and is in self-balance.

Steering and Jumping

If you want a horse with automatic

steering, whether it be around a jump course or out cross-country, then you need the horse to move from back to front and not the reverse. Powerful hindquarters can propel any horse over a fence, but legs that are left behind on takeoff reward the horse with pulled tendons and damaged hocks and stifles. When the hindquarters are working truly forward with engagement of the back, the horse will be able to collect before a fence and jump higher with better clearance of the obstacle.

For the rider the addition of this horsepower to his tool box will equip him with better control on landing to redirect the horse's track or add speed between fences, lengthen the stride between oxers, etc. With dressage training the invaluable half halt will further add to the rider's ability to play with the cadence and collection and lengthening of every stride, a must-have ability to succeed up the levels in any equestrian sport.

Symmetry

All horses and many riders are born one-sided; that is, with a tendency to be stronger on one side of their body than the other. Without sincere effort this asymmetry will become more pronounced over time. The consequences will be lameness and damage to the rider's hips and back.

When the horse is ridden straight, and his suppleness is improved by lateral work, the horse will necessarily have more power and energy to harness in his gaits and over fences. Each stride will be a building stride instead of a breakdown stride.

In dressage terms, when we say a horse is straight, it does not mean that you are riding in a straight line. It means that the footfalls of the hind legs will work directly behind the front legs and that the hind end will not be crooked. Straightness is very important because without it the horse cannot properly engage the power of his hindquarters across his topline and through his body. The many lateral exercises in dressage are designed to help improve the horse's straightness incrementally, but the ►



natural crookedness of the horse in the beginning is improved by simpler exercises such as shoulder-fore and shoulder-in. A horse must be ridden “straight” on bends and circles as well as on the straight line for him to harness his hindquarters for maximum energy and soundness.

Suppleness

With the increased suppleness of the horse and rider from dressage training and the correct straight and forward movement, both equine and human will learn how to use and consistently develop their “core.” The gymnastic development and ability to engage the core adds ever more expression of gaits from the horse through cadence, grants more ability to make smooth transitions within and

between gaits, and protects the back of both horse and rider from damage. As the core muscles are developed and used automatically, any unnecessary strain on the muscles, ligature, and bony processes of the spine is alleviated.

Focus

The demands of dressage can significantly improve the ability of both horse and rider to focus. As the building blocks of dressage offer a simple and effective method to work and train, the requests are broken down into smaller pieces and thus both equine and human have time to digest, feel, and address what they need to learn

in relaxation. The interference of a fence, an unknown terrain, or strange environment is thus removed.

You do not need to rush out and buy a dressage saddle to try this discipline. Simply remove your feet from the stirrup irons and adjust your position to a straight line from ear, shoulder, elbow, hip, to heel.

The dressage arena is level and hopefully has good footing, so it is the perfect location to build strength in the physique of the horse and to improve him gymnastically. Harmony in the partnership, encompassing trust together with obedience and submission to the rider’s requests are all significantly improved through dressage training and both horse and rider learn how to control their bodies and access and learn the timing and application of the aids.

For Western Riders Too

In my many years as a dressage clinician I have been privileged to teach riders from multiple riding disciplines. It always thrills me to see the improvement in the horse that simple dressage exercises provide, even when the horse and/or rider have not had any previous dressage training. The riders are delighted by the new soft feel of their horses both in the reins and under their seat.

Although there are certainly many differences between English and Western dressage, the basic levels of the Western dressage tests have much to offer in understanding the biomechanics of the horse and addressing the horse’s brain as much as his muscle.

You do not need to rush out and buy a dressage saddle to try this discipline. Simply remove your feet from the stirrup irons and adjust your position to a straight line from ear, shoulder, elbow, hip, to heel. Allow yourself to drape over the horse and do not grip. Have your toes pointing forward and maintain your heel as the lowest point on your foot. After a few sessions in basic dressage work you will be hooked. The dressage tack naturally helps you maintain a dressage position, but that can come later.

Explore dressage! It’s really fun. ■

About the author:

Nikki Alvin-Smith is an international Grand Prix dressage trainer/clinician who has competed in Europe at the Grand Prix level earning scores of over 72%. Together with her husband Paul, who is also a Grand Prix rider, they operate a private horse breeding/training farm in Stamford, NY.



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Business Tips and Free Resources for Self-Employed Equine Professionals

By Julie I. Fershtman, Attorney at Law



Professionals in the horse industry such as instructors, trainers, boarding stable owners, and breeders work much harder than most people. Their hours are anything but 9 to 5, and weekend work is usually expected. Most equine professionals are self-employed businesses. Working harder is not an option, but they can work smarter.

This article addresses several tips for self-employed equine professionals, including resources that are available for free.

Free Resources

Federal Government Resources

The Federal government offers programs, services, and information for small businesses. One example is the U.S. Small Business Administration (“SBA”). The SBA, an independent federal agency, was created to, among other things, “aid, counsel, assist and protect the interests of small-business concerns.” Its website (www.sba.gov) includes several resources on how to manage and grow a business, along with links to local offices and online courses.

State Government Resources

Your state department of agriculture may have programs and resources, such as rural development programs, to help your business. Contact your state agriculture department or visit its website to learn more.

Business Mentoring

Equine professionals on a limited budget might be unable to afford business “coaches.” This author has heard great things about SCORE (www.score.org), a service that offers free business mentoring, workshops and educational resources.

Horse-Related Associations

Association membership can offer several benefits such as discounts on products that professionals use regularly ranging from tractors, trucks, cell phones, helmets, and riding gear to office supplies. Learn the discounts and take advantage of them.

Business Licenses

Equine professionals may not realize that many state and local governments have licensing requirements that apply to them. For example:

- California requires almost all businesses to be licensed.
- Massachusetts requires stables and riding instructors to be licensed.
- Georgia’s Animal Protection Act requires a license from the Georgia Department of Agriculture for stables that charge a fee for boarding, training, breeding, and riding.
- Maryland licenses commercial stables (such as boarding, lesson, rental rescue, or sanctuary stables), and some counties in Maryland require a county stable license for certain business operations.
- The City of Philadelphia requires a commercial stable license, while the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania appears to have no such license requirement.

- Michigan once licensed riding stables but suspended its program years ago.

To learn more, check your state’s Department of Revenue, Department of Commerce, or Department of Agriculture.

Insurance

- **Health insurance.** Because of the many inherent risks associated with working around horses, it makes good sense for self-employed equine professionals to have health insurance in effect.
- **Disability Income Insurance.** Self-employed professionals in the horse industry should consider buying disability insurance. If illness or injury renders the professional unable to work, this insurance would replace a portion of his or her lost income for a designated period of time.
- **Liability insurance.** Proper liability insurance is especially important for equine professionals and can include:
 - Commercial General Liability Insurance
 - Care, Custody, and Control Insurance
 - Equine Professional Liability Insurance

Your insurance agent can discuss options and coverages with you.

Conclusion

Your equine business is a business, even if it may be small in scope. Manage your business carefully, and take advantage of free resources that can help you run your business more effectively and profitably. ■

This article does not constitute legal advice. When questions arise based on specific situations, direct them to a knowledgeable attorney.

About the Author:

Julie Fershtman is one of the nation’s most experienced Equine Law practitioners. A lawyer for 32 years, she is a Shareholder with Foster Swift Collins & Smith, PC, in Michigan. She has successfully handled equine cases in 18 jurisdictions nationwide and has tried equine cases in 4 states. She is listed in *The Best Lawyers in America* and is the recipient of the ABA’s 2 “Excellence in the Advancement of Animal Law Award” in 2017. Her speaking engagements span 29 states. For more information, please visit www.equinelaw.net.

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Required Every Day Carry for the Professional Instructor:

What's In Your Pocket?

By Doug Emerson,
The Profitable Horseman

IT'S SUMMER TIME and weathered wood fences and barns are getting a face lift with new paint.

A professionally painted barn with solid coverage, contrasting trim colors and precisely cut-in window panes is an art form horsemen appreciate. Professional painters work their magic quickly to create their brand of cover art.

In contrast, have you ever watched an amateur paint a barn? It resembles a Charlie Chaplin silent movie routine:

- 1 Raise ladder into position on barn siding
- 2 Return to garage to get forgotten screwdriver to open paint can
- 3 Remove lid and return to garage to get rag to wipe spilled paint on side of can
- 4 Climb up ladder with full can of paint and brush
- 5 Climb down ladder with almost full can of paint to find hook to hang can on ladder
- 6 After climbing back up ladder and finding loose paint, back down again to locate scraper and putty knife
- 7 Ladder on uneven ground tips over as painter begins to climb

You get the idea and perhaps have had the exact experience. A lack of proper tools for a job makes for a very long and



non-productive day at work.

Most likely you've watched people at work in various trades. They all carry their tools for the job in a tool belt or at fingertip reach. Electricians, roofers and siding installers often work on ladders and have learned it's far easier to carry the common tools in a belt rather than make trip after trip down and back up a ladder for forgotten tools.

Your farrier probably carries a hoof knife in his apron and you can be sure his tools are positioned in a shoeing box less than an arm's length away. When you're bent over holding a heavy hoof in hand, efficiency reduces wasted time and muscle strain.

Surprisingly, unlike skilled trade workers, it's not uncommon to see other workers carrying only a few tools to help them through the day.

Examples are:

- A construction laborer who operates a wheel barrow for eight hours in light rain without the benefit of a set of gloves or rain gear

- An office worker who shows up for a meeting without a pen or notepad
- Or a salesperson who never has a business card or a pen to write up a sale.

Workers in horse businesses are guilty of coming to work without their tool belts or tool boxes as frequently as any other industry. If a person works hands-on with horses daily, a tool belt or tool box may include: a pocket knife sharp enough to cut leather or a lead line in an emergency, pen, notepad, gloves, a watch or cell phone to know what time it is and always a belt to unbuckle quickly to wrap around the neck of a loose halter-less horse.

Riding instructors who try to navigate through their days without the benefit of their own personal tools within easy reach complain about their lack of productivity and blame everyone and everything except themselves.

Riding instructors' primary product/service is their time. Wasted time means shorter lessons for the student and less revenue for the instructor. An instructor's tool belt or tool box should include: planner/calendar (electronic or paper based) smart phone, pen and notepad, business cards and the forms, documents and contracts they need for the day.

Of course, instructors don't need to have these tools strapped on their bodies like a handyman, but it's silly not to have them close by and easily accessible.

There is no need to make any more wasted trips up and down your occupation's work ladder. Part of the role of the professional instructor is to report for work each day with the tools to perform as a true professional. Your profit will increase as well as the respect for you by your students. ■

About the author:

Doug Emerson writes, speaks and consults about running a profitable horse business. His favorite method of helping professional horsemen is through one day workshops focusing on the business half of the horse business. You can find out more at: www.ProfitableHorseman.com





The Real Instructor

By Christine Olsen

WORKING WITH HORSES at a busy lesson stable, I am fully aware that I am not the only instructor. Horses provide many lessons for kids on their own, both in and out of the saddle. It is important to know when to step in and assist, and when to step back and let the master teach the class.

After hours of back-to-back lessons, I have a chance to help the kids in the barn and spend time with our wonderful horses. One evening I was grooming a horse while two girls were grooming another in the stall directly across the aisle. While I had the curry comb on his back one of the girls screamed out loud, “What is he doing?”

Alarmed, I took a step back to examine him. Everything looked okay so I brushed off her comment and continue grooming. Suddenly there was an uproar of laughter. Now I had to know what was going on!

As it turned out while I was brushing him he was wiggling his lips in cheerful delight. The two young girls had never seen this before and I’m sure it was a sight. I laughed along with them and we decided to work more on his body to find more spots he would enjoy. This is when it was time for me to step out of the way and let the horse do his thing.

They politely took turns with the curry comb, going over the spots I had gone over and trying new ones. The gelding kept them entertained for several minutes as they collaborated and eagerly worked as a team to make him happy. While one held

the brush the other stood watch over his face, reporting back to the groomer what his nose was doing. They were watching his expression, noting what he liked, and at times what he didn’t like.

One of the girls turned her attention back to the horse they left behind and she wondered if they could do the same thing to her. As they went back to the other stall I stayed behind to finish up. I thanked the horse for working overtime and for teaching another lesson that night while I snuck him a peppermint. His eyes lit up as he heard the sound of the peppermint wrapper and he happily accepted the offering. While he crunched his reward I watched the girls across the aisle still working the curry comb while watching the mare’s nose for any indication of approval.

While I watched their effective teamwork I stood impressed with our horses and how they are such great teachers. I considered how much I can still learn from them myself. Kids come into the barn to ride a horse and they can’t wait to ride fast. I remember being young and thinking of nothing else but wanting to gallop around like I saw people do in the movies. At some point I too had to learn there was more to horses than just riding.

We might call ourselves the instructors in the barn but when it comes to the big important stuff, leave it to the real professionals. Some lessons are best delivered straight from the horse’s mouth. ■

➤ *Cameo’s cauldron continued from page 34* professional to help with your business plan or you accounts. What exactly is causing your brain distress and who might be able to help find a way to resolve that?

I think all of this applies to our students too. If you have a couple of students who seem to be struggling despite all the you have tried, perhaps it is not just the information imparted during the lesson that is causing the problem. I am not suggesting you begin taking on the role of physical, spiritual or mental therapist for them. But if you can help them to define the problem area, it may lead to someone who can help.

One of the important bits of information here is that all the things you do or don’t do each day is effecting your health in so many ways—physically, mentally, spiritually. There are so very many ways each of these areas can be restored to optimal functioning if we just take a moment to really think about what needs work, and what would truly help improve that area. Alternative medicine and herbal supplements can help both the mind and the body. Do you have an affinity for water, the woods, the stones of mountains? What things do you do during the week that cause your spirit to soar? Just being around these can help you feel healthier and more alive. We need to pay attention to all parts of us as they are all integral to and effecting each other.

They say you are only as old as you feel, so how old does each part of you feel? We need to not just wish we were younger or healthier, we need to actively do something to repair any damage, change poor habits, and replace them with healthier ones so all parts of us feel young, strong and vibrant. If you really listen, you can find the answer. Then all you need do is start taking that path that will lead each part to your “optimal” self. Perhaps when you were born really doesn’t matter as much as how you decide to live each day. ■

About the author:

Cameo Miller is a Masters-level clinical psychologist and a Level IV ARIA Certified Instructor based in Michigan. She is a member of the ARIA Evaluation Panel and National Riding Instructors Convention Staff.

... in which Cameo Miller stirs her thoughts and ideas to see what rises to the top.



How Old Are You?

By Cameo Miller

Illustration by Bethany Caskey

TOBY KEITH wrote a song for Clint Eastwood in which he asked “how old would you be if you didn’t know [when] you were born”. I have long recognized that most people, once they are adults, think of themselves as in their early to mid-30s no matter their chronological age. I like to think of this as our mental age—the age at which our brain decides it is mature and can function optimally. And our brain can maintain this even when other parts of us do not fit. This got me to thinking about each part of us as, perhaps, aging differently.

The body is the next logical choice to look at—our physical age. We all know people who are very old chronologically, but whose body continues to function as if the person were much younger. We equally know of those who have only lived a relatively few years, but whose body functions as if they were ancient. Sometimes this is due to chronic illness, but you are also

aware of those with serious physical problems who are doing seemingly miraculous things and who look to be in fine physical shape. Is it genetics? Is it mind over matter? Is there a connection between how old the mind thinks it is and how the body responds to this?

The third of this trinity is spiritual age. Is the person’s grounded-ness in whatever their spiritual affinity is reflected in their mental and physical age? If we are doing what we love, what puts so much positive energy back into us, does that have a healing and life preserving effect on us? Those who practice the eastern arts, like yoga, certainly think so. So what does any of this have to do with you as an instructor? Quite a bit I believe. If you take a moment to really think about what “age” each of the parts of you are, you will know where you might need to do more work to live a long, healthy and happy life.

Some people’s mind is still in child mode so that they do reckless and sometimes irresponsible things. That mid 30s mind can be playful which is very different. And you can engage in adrenaline producing activities while still being responsible and judicious. You can feel weighed down, overwhelmed, even defeated if your mind is depressed, anxious, or there is so much brain fog that you feel old? It doesn’t matter what shape your body is in if your mind is so overwhelmed that all you want to do is hide under the covers in bed. If this devastated feeling goes on long enough, it has a debilitating effect on the body. Have you not taken care of your physical body so that stiffness and parts that don’t work well anymore are causing you difficulties? Have you even thought about the quieting contentment of spirituality in the past few years? I contend that truly thinking about each and correcting any problem areas can cause you

to not only live longer and be happier, but be better at all you endeavor to do as well. I also contend that it all goes together. The spiritual part doesn’t need to be church attendance—go for a quiet ride on your

favorite horse in the woods or along the beach. Sit in the barn at night and listen to the contented munching of your happy equine friends. This will put positive energy back into you. Remember that little smile and big sigh you have when this “spirit” flows into you—that has a very positive effect on the distress of the mind. And quieting the mind and spirit causes a decrease in harmful body chemicals like adrenalin, cortisol and the serum level of several hormones. This can lessen inflammation, which can give the body a chance to heal damaged bits. What do you need

to do to further heal those damaged bits?

Even a few sessions of physical therapy or with a fitness trainer might help you to understand how you could change some habits at home to lessen damage, or do things differently which might even improve your overall functioning. We have all heard how using exercise equipment incorrectly can cause more harm than good—what we do around the house and barn is the same. We can use the extensive exercise we all get every day to keep our bodies fit and strong rather than breaking them down. Don’t forget the nutritional aspect—eating HEALTHY, preferably organic, food gives our bodies the nutrients it needs to function optimally. If you aren’t eating in a healthy way, that may be part of the problem, part of what is contributing to your mind or body feeling older than it should. And don’t forget the mental part either. If you need to, seek professional help. This doesn’t always mean a therapist—although it might. Maybe it’s a business

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